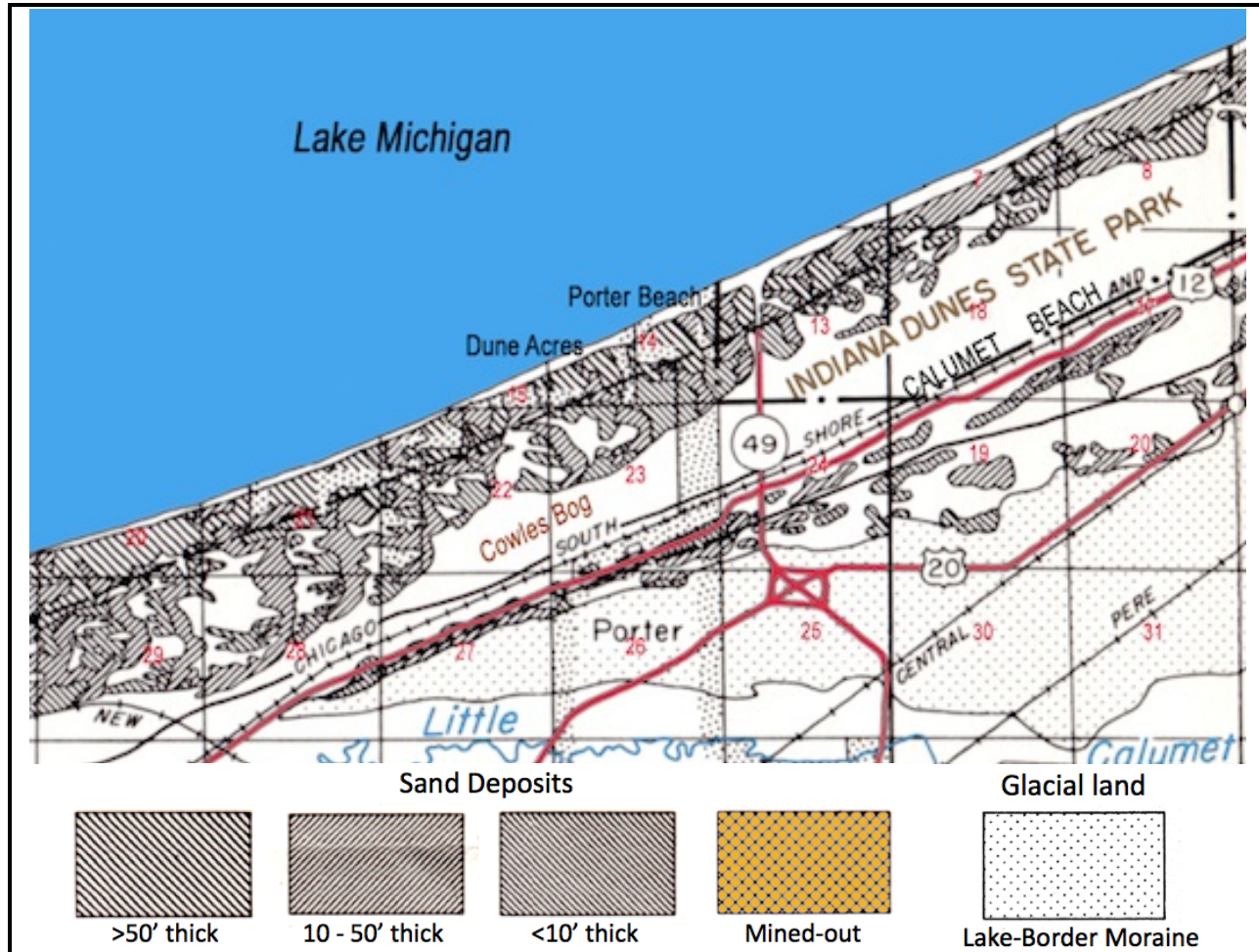


Chapter 7

Sand Mining in Porter County: Westchester Township



Adapted from Bieber and Smith, 1952¹

Most of the sand mining in Porter County has occurred in its western portion, within Portage and northwestern Westchester Townships. Because in the mid-1920s the dunes in the eastern half of Westchester Township were largely unspoiled, that area was chosen for Indiana Dunes State Park.

In 1950, when the above map was prepared by Geologists Bieber and Smith, there were no mined-out areas and no active sand mining operations occurring in Westchester Township. However, mining on the Bethlehem Steel and NIPSCO properties (on the west side of the township) was soon to begin.

¹ Sections from Route 49 west are in Township 37 North, Range 6 West. Sections east of that are in Township 37 North, Range 5 West.

Dune Park / Bethlehem and NIPSCO Properties (Sections 20, 21 and 22; 29, 28, and 27)

As early as the 1920s NIPSCO officials recognized that the heavy industry expected to be established in northwest Indiana would require much more electricity than the company was then able to supply, so two years after² National Steel Company's 1930 announcement that it planned to build a steel plant at Burns Ditch, NIPSCO purchased 350 acres of dune land east of the proposed plant.³

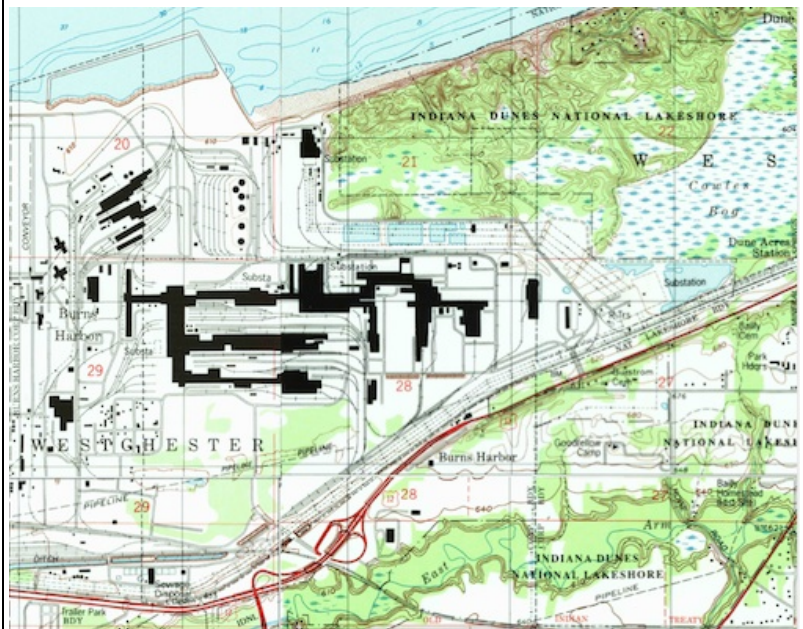
The Bethlehem Steel Company, wanting a steel mill closer to its customers in the Midwest, and assuming that the efforts to build a public port would be successful, in 1956 began purchasing land still owned by Consumers Corporation immediately east of the proposed port.

In 1962 Bethlehem announced that it intended to build a mill at this site. Assured that Congress would soon approve funding for a port that it could use, Bethlehem arranged for Missouri Valley Dredging Company to remove 2½ million cubic yards of sand and deliver the sand to Northwestern University where it would be used for Northwestern's eastward expansion into Lake Michigan. Bethlehem began construction soon thereafter.

Accused of complicity with the destruction of the Indiana Dunes,⁴ the University's board president claimed that when Northwestern signed its contract with Missouri Valley, it was not aware of where the sand was coming from.⁵



Upper part: USGS *Ogden Dunes*, 1953 and *Dune Acres*, 1953
Lower part: USGS *Portage*, 1960 and *Chesterton*, 1953



Upper part: USGS *Ogden Dunes*, 1991 and *Dune Acres*, 1991
Lower part: USGS *Portage*, 1992 and *Chesterton*, 1991

² Engle, 1983, p. 236.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Izaak Walton Magazine*, 1962.

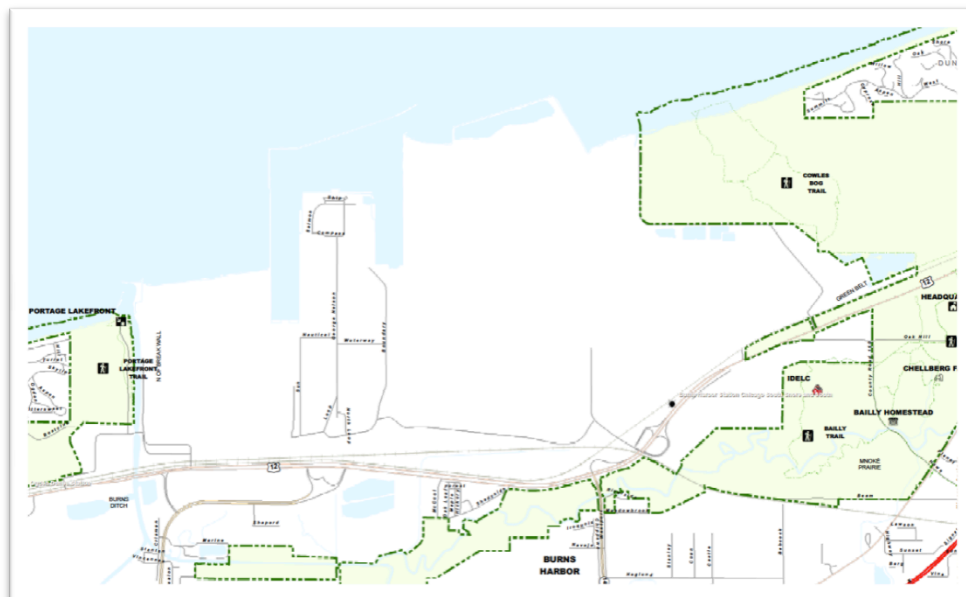
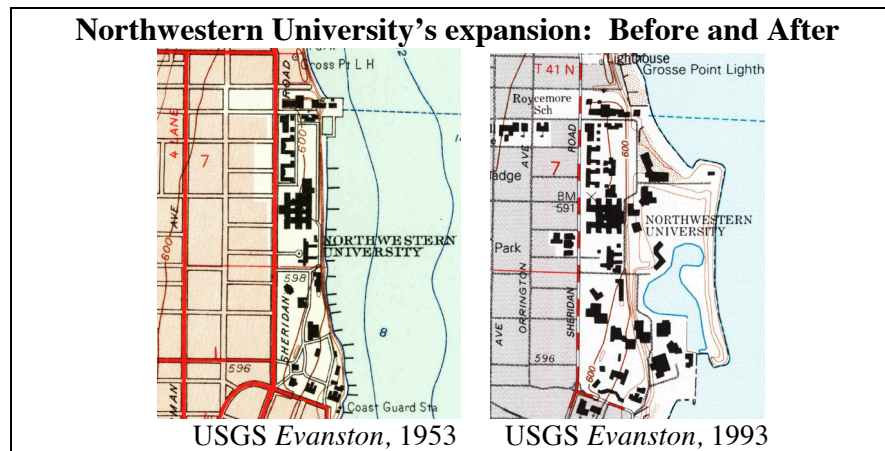
⁵ *NU Alumni News*, July 1962, p. 1.

Assured that Congress would soon authorize a port, mining of the Central Dunes began in December of 1962.⁶ Bethlehem's grand opening was held September 16, 1965. By 1966 it had 2,400 employees.

The Port of Indiana was approved by Congress in 1966. Construction on it began almost immediately. The first ore boat arrived in September, 1969, and Bethlehem produced its first steel in December of that same year.⁷



The continuous conveyor system that carried sand from the Central Dunes to a loading slip where it was put on barges for cross-lake delivery to Northwestern University.
[Post Tribune photo (7-25-63) held at the CRA]



⁶ Engle, 1983, p. 270.

⁷ Gray, 1998, pp. 45-59.

Johnson's Beach (Porter Beach) and Waverly Beach (E¼ Section 14)

The Swedish John P. Johnson family established a commercial fishing operation at Waverly Beach (where Indiana Dunes State Park is now) in 1907. A decade or so later they opened a restaurant where freshly caught fish dinners were the prime attraction. (See ad below.) When, in the mid-1920s, the state bought Waverly Beach for its new state park, the Johnsons moved their family business about a quarter mile west and started over at what came to be called "Johnson's Beach." There they constructed several buildings as well as a road (Waverly) south to the Dunes Highway so that their customers could easily get to their new restaurant and inn.

COME TO
WAVERLY BEACH
FOR A GOOD TIME

J.P. Johnson & Son have just opened their New Restaurant and are prepared to serve fine

FISH DINNERS

Bathing House In Connection. Bathing Suits and Boats to Rent. Fine Furnished Cottage to Rent.

Waverly Beach is an ideal place to spend your vacation. Fine accommodations, excellent macadamized road to beach

For Appointments Telephone 504-M 2
P. O. Address Chesterton, Box 26

Chesterton Tribune ad
[Westchester Museum]



Waverly Beach before 1925

[Westchester Twp History Museum]



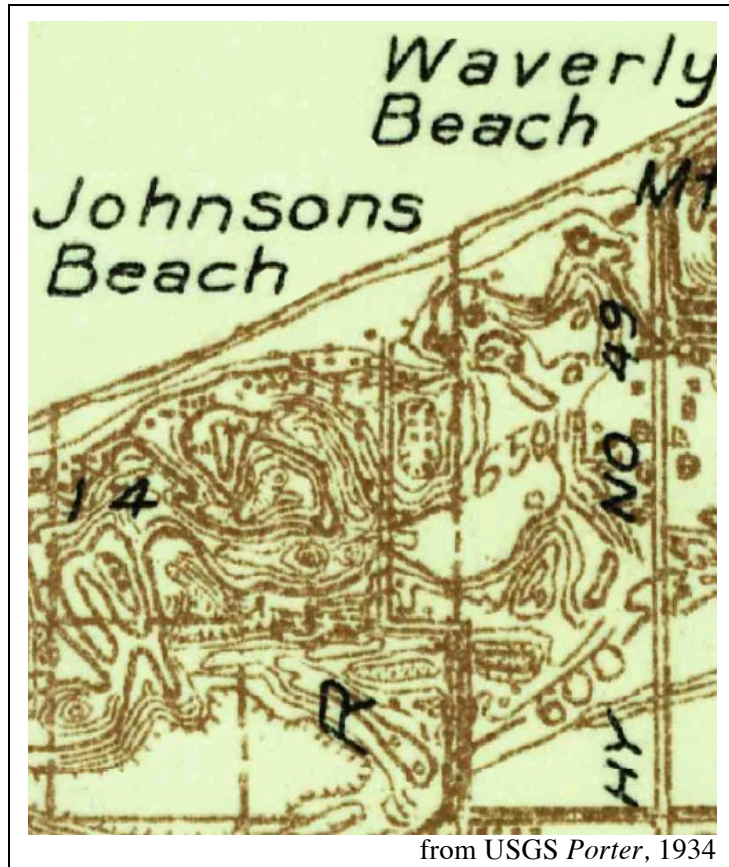
Johnsons Beach, 1936

[Calumet Regional Archives]

As can be seen on the 1934 topographic map (the earliest made for the area) at that time at least both beaches were quite wide where the Johnsons had their fishing operations. The family could have easily removed small dunes on the property, but did not have the equipment for large-scale excavation. They certainly did move sand around in order to provide foundations for their buildings and a decent road south to U.S. Highway 12.

Although subdivided in the 1890s, there was little or no development of the Porter Beach area until after the Dunes Highway was built in 1922-23.

At first, families purchased lots and built summer cottages to be near the lake. Later on, folks purchased several adjacent lots (the originals were just 25-foot wide) and built much nicer and larger year-round homes.

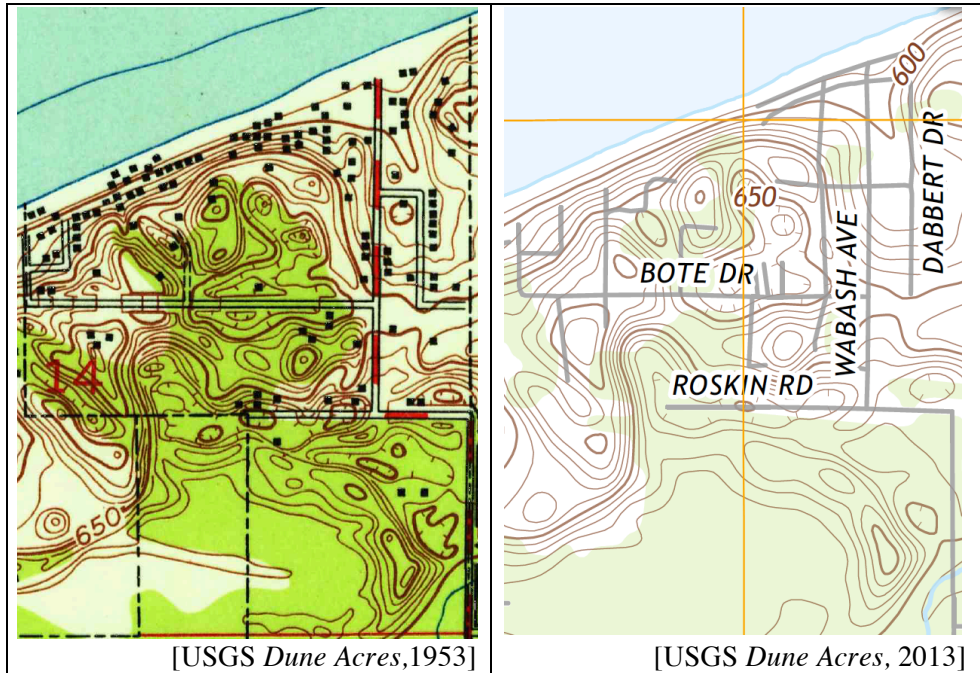


from USGS Porter, 1934

In 2015, a property owner must have five adjacent lots in order to build. Although it has made for some rather steep roads, the goal of developers has been to build upon the dunes and not remove them first.

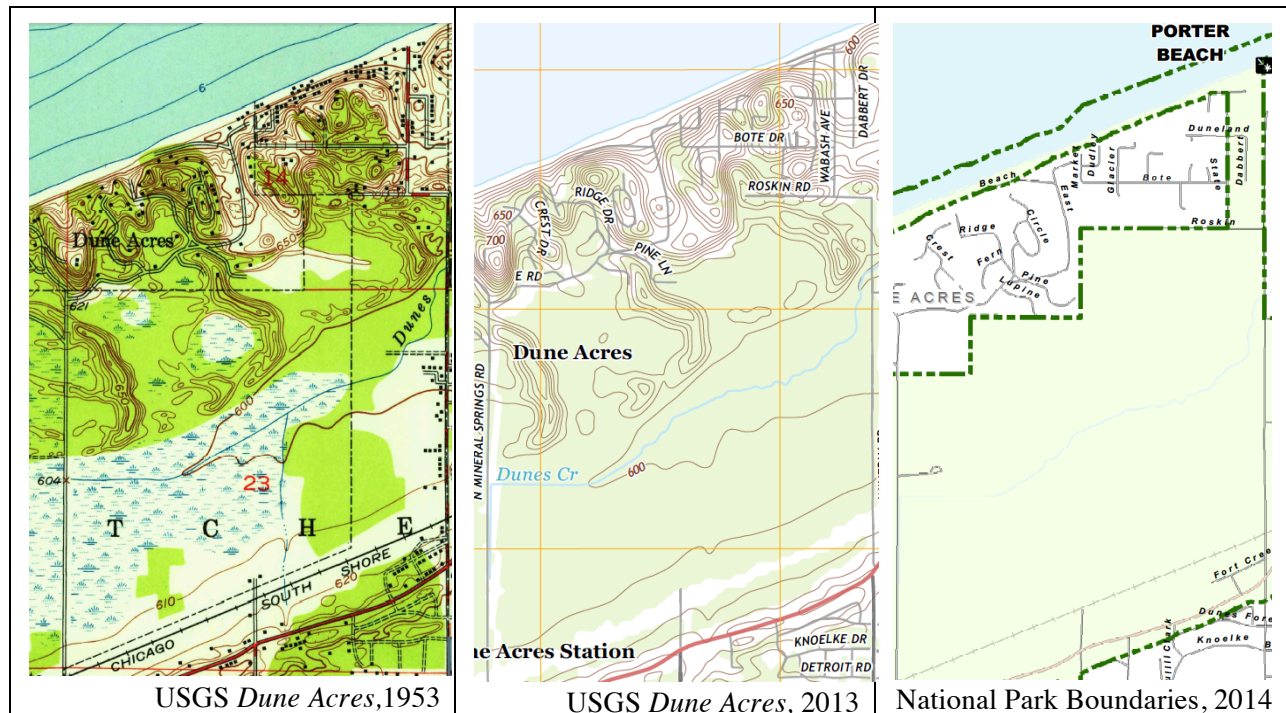
As seen in the above and following topographic maps, there has been little change in the topography of the Porter Beach area since the 1930s.

The wetland south of Porter Beach is part of Cowles Bog, which is part of the Great Marsh. Years back, the goal of the early settlers in the area was to “re-claim” the land by draining wetlands. In years since, the goal has been to preserve and restore wetlands. Since the 2013 map was surveyed, much of the Great Marsh has been restored. There



has been no sand mining in this area—because where there is sand, the water table is too high to economically extract sand from the ground.

A comparison of the 1953 and 2013 topographic maps shows how little the landscape changed within the last 60 years. Congress included the portion of Porter Beach east of Wabash Avenue in the National Lakeshore. Dabbbert Drive, east of Wabash and within the Park boundaries, closely follows the natural topography as it goes up a former blowout, but some modifications, done years back when cottages were built there, are still evident.



Dunes State Park (Sections 12, 7, 8, 14, 13, 18, and 17)

Indiana Dunes State Park is a direct result of the Save-the-Dunes movement of 1915. The previously-owned properties were purchased by the state in the early 1920s, and the park opened July 1, 1926. Containing about 3 miles of beach and roughly 3½ square miles of land, it soon became one of the state's most popular parks. The eastern 2/3 of the park, including its three highest dunes, is a nature preserve.



Johnson's Beach (far left) and the State Park in the early 1950s still showing several of the beach houses near Mt. Holden. [USGS *Dune Acres*, 1953]



Bucket Crane at the east [west?] end of Dunes State Park, June 15, 1931. [Arthur Anderson: Fisher Collection, CRA.]

There is no record of large-scale sand mining at Indiana Dunes State Park, yet the flat area south of the pavilion is evidence that some excavation has occurred. The photo to the left was taken by Arthur E. Anderson in 1931. Its caption (probably typed by James Fisher in 1955) noted that the excavation was at the east end of the park. Perhaps that was in error and the excavation was at the west end where that year the Dunes Arcade Hotel was built and the park entrance road improved. Ground was obviously slightly reshaped in order to build roads and establish features such as the park campgrounds.

Borrow Pits

Along Interstate 94 in Westchester Township there are a number of small ponds that were excavated when the highway was built. The soil removed was used to raise the level of the

highway. This includes the lake in Lakewood Park, Lake Charles, Lake Florence, and Pratt Lake⁸.

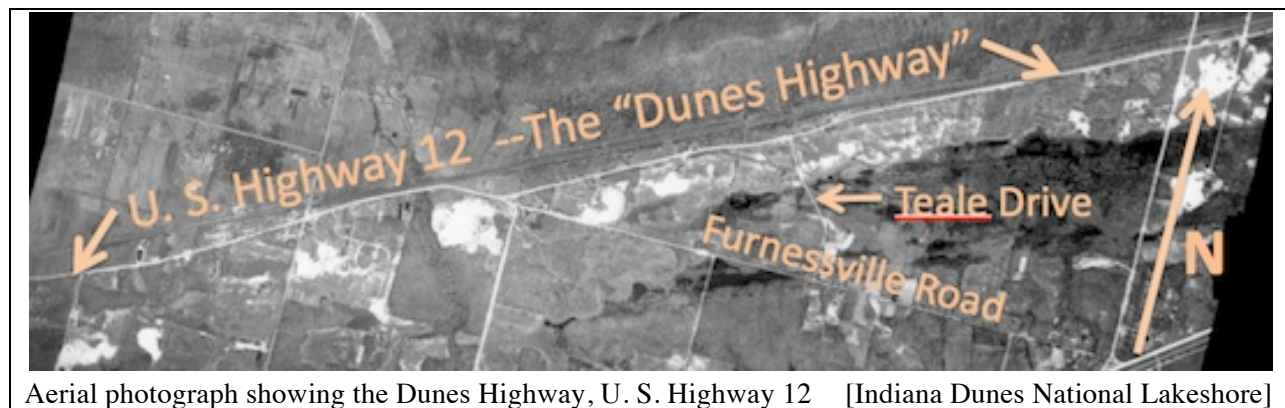
⁸ The *Vidette-Messenger*, July 25, 1973, page 14. Pratt Lake was excavated in 1969: Canright and Hopkins, 2011

The Dunes Highway (Parts of sections 24, 19, 18, 17, and 16)

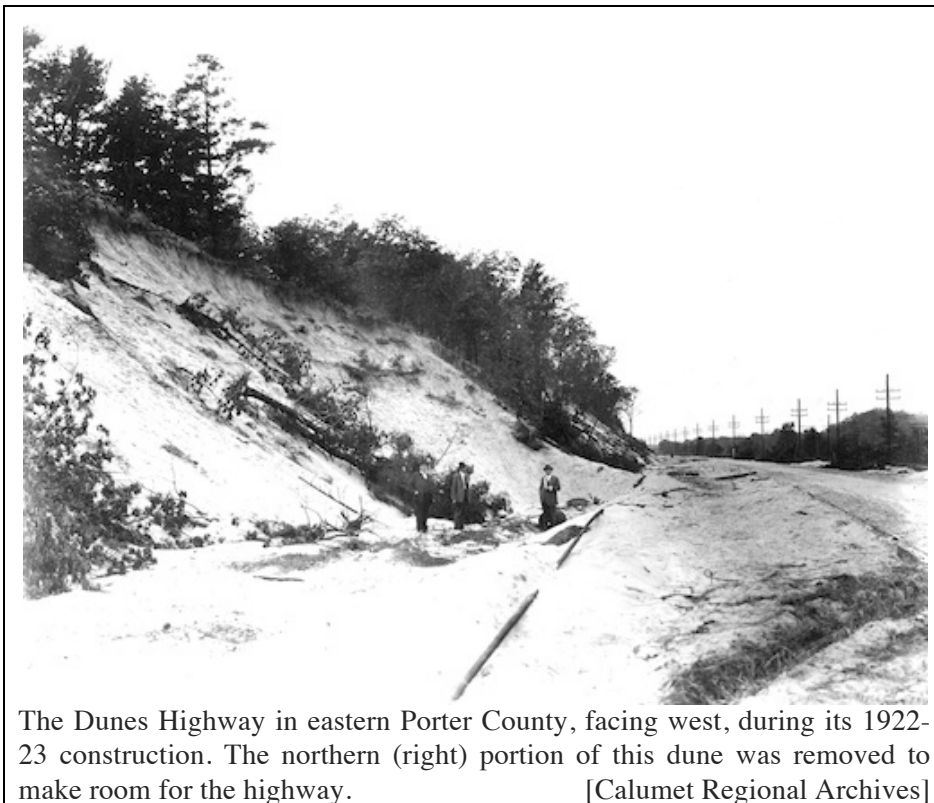
The Dunes Highway in Westchester Township generally follows the old Calumet Shoreline and, at least when it was built in 1922-23, there were Calumet-aged dunes along the highway on the south side. Designated U. S. 12, and connecting Chicago with Detroit, it soon became the busiest highway in all of Indiana.

Thus gas stations, restaurants, and motels sprang up along the highway—but because many folks wanted to build on the south side of the road, dunes were removed to make room for development at or slightly above the road level.

The 1939 photograph below shows, in white, those areas that were cleared of their vegetative cover, many then also cleared of their dunes, exposing the bright, nearly white sands. Note that nearly all the excavations were on the south side of the road, where the dunes had been located.



Aerial photograph showing the Dunes Highway, U. S. Highway 12 [Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore]

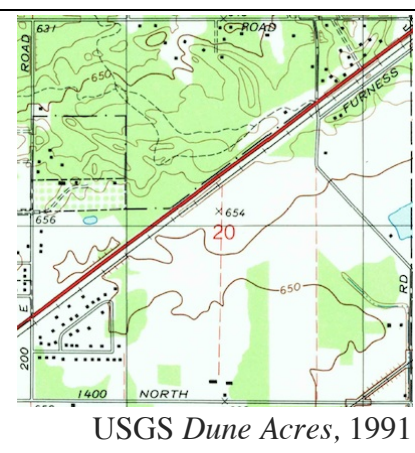
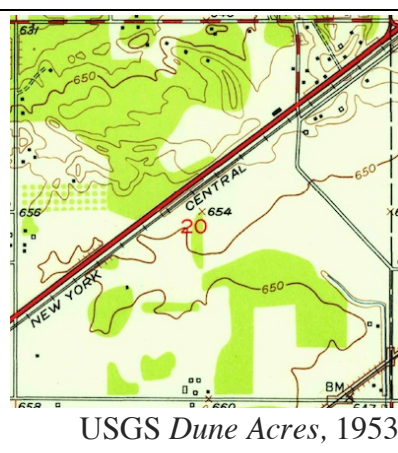
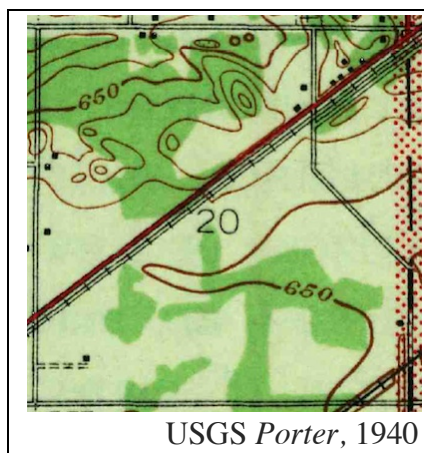
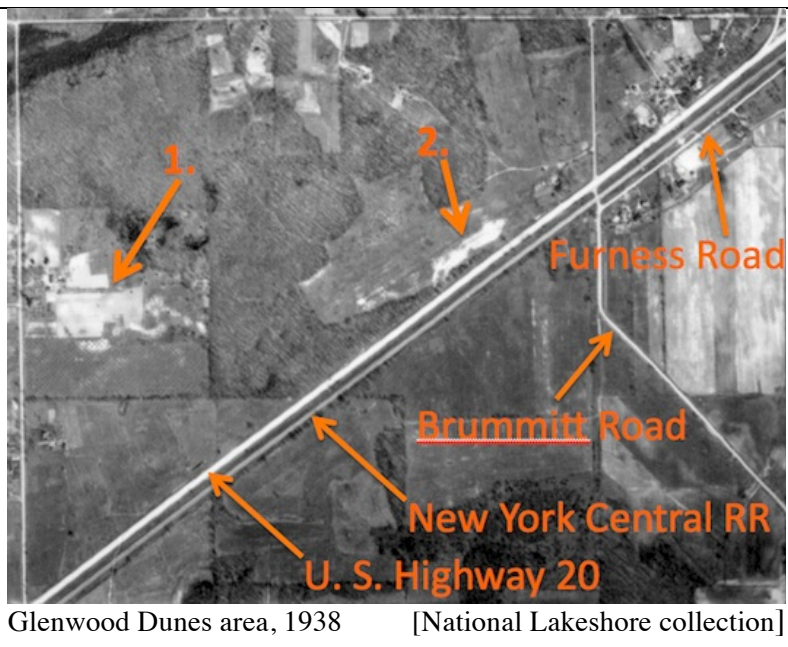


The Dunes Highway in eastern Porter County, facing west, during its 1922-23 construction. The northern (right) portion of this dune was removed to make room for the highway. [Calumet Regional Archives]

Glenwood Dunes // (Old Ly-co-ki-we) Horse Trail (Section 20)

Section 20 contains Glenwood-aged dunes—primarily in its northern half, Calumet-aged dunes—but only in its far north-west corner, and the Lake Border Moraine—primarily in its southern half. In the 1930s, a small area of these Glenwood-aged dunes was cleared and the small dunes parallel to the highway were mined (shown in white, #2, to the right).

The larger white area (#1) was cleared, apparently graded, and used as a Christmas tree farm. It is shown on the 1953 and 1991 maps below as three rows of small green dots.



The Glenwood Dunes portion of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore includes the Glenwood Dunes trail (formerly titled “Ly-co-ki-we”). Horseback riding is welcomed from March 16 through December 14; cross-country skiers when snow permits.

